12 DANCING BODIES

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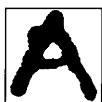
If you are asked to describe an object, you answer that it is a body with a surface, impenetrable, shaped, coloured, and movable. But subtract all these adjectives from your definition and what is left of that imaginary being you call a body?—Denis Diderot, "Letters on the Deaf and Dumb"



s a dancer working with, in, and through the body, I experience it as a body-of-ideas. I believe it is, as Diderot observed, the sum of all the adjectives that can be applied to it. I know the body only through its response to the methods and techniques used to cultivate it.

When I read recent critical writing about the body, I am, on the one hand, delighted at this new interest in it, and on the other, dismayed by the tendency to treat it as a symbol for desire or sexuality, for a utopia, for that which is unique to woman or for the elusive nature of the text. These writings seldom address the body I know; instead, they move quickly past arms, legs, torso, and head on their way to a theoretical agenda that requires something unknowable or unknown as an initial premise. The body remains mysterious and ephemeral, a convenient receptacle for their new theoretical positions.

Alternatively, these writings scrutinize and analyze the body, but only as a product of the various discourses that measure it. Here it exists as the referent for genres of calculation that concern the historian of science or sexuality: we learn intriguing details about the significance of sundry anatomical parts and how they have been subjected to study—and, by extension, incorporated into the larger workings of power.

What I miss in both approaches—the synecdochic substitution of the body for a theoretical topos or its metonymic replacement by a set of measurements—is a more meat-and-bones approach to the body based on an analysis of discourses or practices that *instruct* it. Roland Barthes refers to it in this way when he describes Bunraku puppet performances or the involvement of his

own body in the physical organization of his desk and chair, his daily routines and habits of writing.[1] Michel Foucault delineates aspects of the instructable body when he describes the disciplinary procedures, the lines, hierarchies, and spatial organizations that bodies are asked to maintain as part of the disciplinary lineaments of culture.[2]

These two examples hardly suffice, though, when one considers what might be done toward studying methods of cultivating the body—whole disciplines through which it is molded, shaped, transformed, and in essence created. Such disciplines include all sports and physical-culture pursuits; regulations governing posture, etiquette, and comportment, and what is dubiously titled "nonverbal communication"; habits in the workplace or place of worship; conduct in the performing arts; patterns of standing, lying, sitting, eating, walking, as well as all practices that contribute to the development of what Marcel Mauss has called "techniques of the body."[3] Such practices, Foucault has demonstrated, are part of the fabric of culture itself. They "invest, mark, train and torture the body; they force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, and to emit signs."[4]

The daily practical participation of a body in any of these disciplines makes of it a body-of-ideas. Each discipline refers to it using select metaphors and other tropes that make it over. These tropes may be drawn from anatomical discourse or the science of kinesiology; or they may liken the body to a machine, an animal, or any other worldly object or event. They may be articulated as verbal descriptions of the body and its actions, or as physical actions that show it how to behave. Whether worded or enacted, these tropes change its meaning by re-presenting it.

In what follows, I shall attempt to describe one such body-of-ideas, that of the theatrical dancer. I have imagined that I am addressing someone who has seen but never participated in theatrical dance. My comments fall into two sections: the first focuses on the formation of dancing bodily consciousness, and the second situates this bodily consciousness in a cultural and aesthetic moment. Both are firmly rooted in a Western framework for considering the purpose and value of dance; they cannot avoid, even as they try to provide a perspective on, Western assumptions about the body, the self, and the expressive act.

The Perceived and Ideal Dancing Bodies

Typically, a dancer spends anywhere from two to six hours per day, six to seven days per week for eight to ten years creating a dancing body. During the course of this travail, the body *seems* constantly to elude one's efforts to direct it. The

dancer pursues a certain technique for reforming the body, and the body seems to conform to the instructions given. Yet suddenly, inexplicably, it diverges from expectations, reveals new dimensions, and mutely declares its unwillingness or inability to execute commands. Brief moments of "mastery of the body" or of "feeling at one with the body" occur, producing a kind of ecstasy that motivates the dancer to continue. Clear sensations of improvement or progress—the result of a momentary matching of one's knowledge and awareness of the body with a developing physical capacity—also provide encouragement. The prevailing experience, however, is one of loss, of failing to regulate a miragelike substance. Dancers constantly apprehend the discrepancy between what they want to do and what they can do. Even after attaining official membership in the profession, one never has confidence in the body's reliability. The struggle continues to develop and maintain the body in response to new choreographic projects and the devastating evidence of aging.

Training thus creates two bodies: one, perceived and tangible; the other, aesthetically ideal. The dancer's perceived body derives primarily from sensory information that is visual, aural, haptic, olfactory, and perhaps most important, kinaesthetic. Dancers see large portions of their own bodies, a vista that changes as they move. They hear the sounds produced by locomotion, by one body part contacting another, by the breath and by joints and muscles creaking, popping, and grinding as they flex, extend, and rotate. They feel the body's contact with the ground, with objects or persons, and with parts of itself, and they sense its temperature and sweat. They smell sweat and breath. They sense kinesthetic indications of the tension or relaxation, tautness or laxness, and degree of exertion for every muscle, the action of any joint, and consequently the proximity of one bone to another, the relationship of any part of the body to gravity, and the entire body's equilibrium. Any of this information about the perceived body may be incorporated into the dancer's ideal body, where it combines with fantasized visual or kinesthetic images of a body, images of other dancers' bodies, and cinematic or video images of dancing bodies. The dancer's ideal body may specify size, shape, and proportion of its parts as well as expertise at executing specific movements. Both bodies, the perceived and the ideal, consist of the skeletal, muscular, and nervous systems and any fat tissue of the biological body. The lungs, stomach, sense organs, circulatory systems exist only minimally; other organs and the endocrine system not at all.

Both bodies are constructed in tandem; each influences the development of the other. Both result from the process of taking dance classes, as well as watching dance and talking about it. Cumulatively, these activities help the dancer to develop skills at attending to, duplicating, repeating, and remembering bodily movement. A third kind of body, the demonstrative body, mediates

the acquisition of these skills by exemplifying correct or incorrect movement. Where the ideal body eludes the dancer with its perfection, the demonstrative body didactically emphasizes or even exaggerates actions necessary to improve dancing: it isolates moments in a movement sequence or parts of the body in order to present an analysis of the ideal. The demonstrative body displays itself in the body of the teacher, and sometimes in one's own image in the mirror and in the bodies of other students in the class and their mirror images. For example, when I look at another student in the class, I see her or his body not as that of a friend or an acquaintance, but as the bodily instantiation of desired or undesired, correct or incorrect, values.

Several systematic programs of instruction, known as "dance techniques," exist for studying the perceived body, organizing the information its presents, and correlating it with demonstrative and ideal bodies. Each technique cultivates bodily strength, flexibility, and alignment, the shapes made by the body, the rhythm of its movement, and the quality and amount of tension throughout it. Most techniques offer both a body topography, a mapping of key areas on or in it, as well as principles governing the proper relations of these areas. In dance technique classes, this topography is put in motion by performing sequences of movement usually designated by the demonstrative body of the teacher.

Unlike the private classes offered in the technique of playing a musical instrument, dance classes are usually attended by fifteen to fifty students at a time. They occur daily, rather than weekly or monthly, and they rarely present for study and performance an entire dance composition. Phrases or sections of dances may be taught, but the issues of interpretation, development, coherence, or style of performance are more often addressed in rehearsal for a specific work rather than in technique class. Furthermore, dancers are not expected to practice extensively on their own. Their training is communal and highly regimented, but it is also context specific. As students learn to duplicate the correctly demonstrative body and to avoid the mistakes of the incorrect body, they present (and are presented with) endless new variations on right and wrong. The demands of both the perceived and the ideal bodies are thus redefined by each teacher with each group of students.

Each dance technique relies on an extensive nomenclature, sometimes literal and sometimes metaphoric, for designating key areas of the body and their relations. A dancer may be asked to "rotate the head of the femur in the hip socket," "lift the floating ribs," or "increase the space between the skull and top cervical vertebra"; alternatively, to become "a balloon expanding with air" or "a puppet." Techniques might visualize the body as a set of abstract lines running close to the bones, as a set of points or regions of the surface and

interior, as a set of forces that lift, descend, expand, or condense specified areas of the body. Dancers pull, tuck, extend, lift, soften, and lengthen areas of the body throughout the duration of the technique class. They learn the curves or angles that body parts can form, and to place these in a particular shape at a given time. They learn to delineate rhythmic structures, to regulate the flow of effort from one part to another, to sculpt, trace, and imprint these parts in space.

Both the exercises themselves and any directives offered by the teacher are usually highly repetitive. Drilling is necessary because the aim is nothing less than *creating the body*. With repetition, the images used to describe the body and its actions *become* the body. Metaphors that are inapplicable or incomprehensible when first presented take on a concrete reality over time, through their persistent association with a given movement. For example, it may at first seem impossible to lift the leg forward using the back thigh muscles, but continued attempts to execute the movement with this image in mind subtly reorganize muscular involvement so as to produce the clear perception that precisely this is happening.

Over months and years of study, the training process repeatedly reconfigures the body: it identifies and names aspects or parts that were previously unrecognized, and it restructures the whole in terms of dynamic actions that relate the various parts. Neither the perceived body nor the ideal body remains constant throughout this process: definitions of both are altered and refined. The mastery of one area of the body's topography enables the dancer to comprehend new images and to reconsider familiar ones from a new perspective. Once one can "lift" the leg from "underneath," one can appreciate anew how to avoid "leaning into the hip" of the "supporting" leg.

Metaphors open out into related metaphors, leading the dancer further into a given system for conceptualizing the body. The daily routines of training consolidate metaphoric knowledge and thereby produce bodily habits, some "good" and some "bad." Good habits form the basis for the newly perceived body, and they allow the student to attend to assimilating additional information. Bad habits (only recognizable as such once they already exist) indicate problems that require special attention. If the metaphoric system in use proves ineffective in eliminating bad habits or in preventing or curing injury, the dancer may discard it in favor of alternative systems. The dancer must decipher each new interpretive framework, however, using as reference the body of metaphors built up through prior training.

As dancers labor to meet the standards for the ideal body—determined sometimes by themselves, at others by a choreographer, style, or tradition—they inevitably encounter areas of bodily resistance or incapacity. These defi-

cits are exaggerated by the intensity of training, and they produce highly distorted, often obsessive images of the perceived body. The training regimen reveals the perceived body to be horribly deficient in the size and proportion of its parts. Its areas of inflexibility and lack of strength or endurance can take on grotesque dimensions. Its inability to imitate shapes, to hear rhythms, or to relax or tense appropriately become an aberrant inadequacy.

Working to correct bad habits, to modify the body's aberrations, and to increase its capabilities, the dancer frequently incurs pain and learns quickly to distinguish between several kinds: constructive pain that will lead to greater strength or flexibility; destructive pain caused by the incorrect positioning or use of a part of the body; chronic pain, the cumulative result of bad habit; pain resulting from too much tension, too little strength, activities other than dance, overambition, inattentiveness, and so on. Some pains remain constant and reliable, and the dancer carries them around as constant features of bodily topography. Others, intermittent and unpredictable, cause the dancer to chase after them in search of a diagnosis that could prevent their recurrence.

As both the perceived and the ideal bodies develop, they increasingly occupy the dancer's consciousness. Over time, dancers increasingly monitor their alignment, the quality of their movement, and their bodily pain—not only in the dance studio but in quotidian situations as well. They may or may not apply technical principles learned in the dance class to daily chores and routines, but they certainly attend more fully to these activities. They also retain kinesthetic information from past performances of these activities so as to begin to acquire a historical sense of their own bodily movements.

Most dance classes emphasize seeing a movement and then performing it, which further heightens the dancer's kinesthetic awareness of others. Dancers, more than those who do not dance, strongly sense what other persons' bodily movements feel like. Walking down the street, they register the characteristic posture and gait of passers-by; in conversation, they sense the slouch, strain, and gesticulations of others. This capacity for kinesthetic empathy, however, rarely includes erotic feelings. The metaphors used to train the dancing body seldom, if ever, refer to the sexual body. The frequent use of mirrors in learning to dance promotes a form of narcissistic enthrallment with the body, but this is usually mitigated by the tendency to focus on, and criticize, bodily inadequacies. The musculoskeletal empathy developed by dancing usually involves an appraisal of the other's and one's own perceived bodies. The sexual bodies, perhaps adjacent to, and informed by, the dancing bodies, remain clearly separate.

A dancer's daily consciousness of the body thus ranges between her or his perceived body—with all its pains and distortions—and images, both fan-

tasized and real, of other bodies. Dancers alternate between, or sometimes fuse together, images from all these bodies as they objectify, monitor, scan, regard, attend to, and keep track of bodily motion throughout the day. The metaphors learned during instruction serve as both markers and interpreters of developing bodily consciousness. They also integrate the training of the body with aesthetic, social, and moral beliefs about dance. The repertoire of metaphors learned in class functions not only to define the dancer's body but also to establish the epistemological foundation for performing dance.

The Body of Dance Techniques

I have tried to describe the development of dancing bodily consciousness in a way that would apply to most programs of instruction. Each dance technique, however, constructs a specialized and specific body, one that represents a given choreographer's or tradition's aesthetic vision of dance. Each technique creates a body that is unique in how it looks and what it can do. Generally, the style and skills it imparts can be transferred only partially to another technique; thus, ballet dancers cannot assume the bearing or perform the vocabulary of movements found in contact improvisation, and vice versa. Training not only constructs a body but also helps to fashion an expressive self that, in its relation with the body, performs the dance. Aesthetic expression can result when a self uses the body as a vehicle for communicating its thoughts and feelings, or when the self merges with the body and articulates its own physical situation. Body and self can also coexist, enunciating their own concerns and commenting on each other's. Many other relations are also possible, each producing a specific aesthetic impact on dancer, dance, and viewer.

In order to illustrate the different forms that expression, both felt and enacted, can take, I have compiled brief descriptions of five twentieth-century techniques that formulate distinct bodies and selves. These descriptions, which emphasize the differences among the techniques, derive from choreographers' and critics' writings about the techniques, as well as from observations I have heard or have made as a student in class. Far from comprehensive, they present only a few key features of each technique in order to suggest possible relationships between body and self that result from instructing the body in a given dance technique.

Ballet Technique. The dominant and most familiar of all theatrical dance techniques is ballet. Of the five bodies to be considered here, it is the only one with requirements for the dancer's physique. Success in this technique depends in part on thin, long limbs capable of displaying the formal geometric features of the tradition (figure 1). The ideal body—light, quick, precise,

1. Ballet class at the School of American Ballet, New York City. Courtesy of the Dance Collection, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

strong—designates the linear shapes, the rhythm of phrases, even the pantomimed gestures, all with lyrical effortlessness. Success also requires the promising student to make an early and dedicated commitment to intensive training. The perceived body, never sufficiently thin or well proportioned, must mold itself repeatedly into the abstract forms presented in class and then on stage. The dancer's self exists to facilitate the craftlike acquisition of skills: it serves the choreographer and, ultimately, the tradition by ordering the body to practice and then to perform ideals of movement.

Classes, organized into several levels of competence, measure the student's progress through a standardized set of physical skills. As with the level of classes, the exercises in a given class progress from simple to more complex. Dancers begin a standard daily sequence with one arm stabilizing the body by holding a barre. They perform movements, announced (in French) by the teacher, originating in, and returning to, basic positions—first on one side and then, switching arms at the barre, on the other. The movements work the legs (always in a turned-out position) and, to a lesser extent, the arms to create variations and embellishments on circular and triangular designs. The torso provides a taut and usually erect center connecting the four appendages and the head. Approximately one half of a class session takes place at the barre. Students then move to the center of the room for longer, more intricate combinations at varying tempos. Class ends with sequences of leaps and turns in which dancers travel across the room diagonally, two or three at a time. Descriptions of movements and corrections are phrased so as to ask parts of the body to conform to abstract shapes; they place the pelvis or head in specific locations, or extend the limbs along imaginary lines in space. Additional criteria based on the precision of timing, clarity of shape, and lightness of quality all measure the student's performance.

The teacher illustrates the correct approach by performing a small excerpt from the phrase—seldom, if ever, an entire sequence. The ideal body glimpsed in performances of the premier dancers thus remains distinct from the demonstrative body that models proper practice. From the teacher's unchallenged authority, students assimilate the system of values and internalize the impulse to evaluate and rank their own and others' performances. Competition, although quiet, is fierce—in part because standards for perfection are so clearly defined. The aesthetic rationale based on the pursuit of classical beauty offers dancers no alternative conceptions of dance: inability to succeed at ballet implies failure at all dance.[5]

Duncan Technique. Reacting in part against the artificial and hierarchical organization of ballet, Isadora Duncan and several other early-twentieth-century choreographers and performers pioneered a radically new dance aes-

2. Isadora Duncan. Photo: Raymond Duncan. Courtesy of the Dance Collection, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

thetic and a concomitant approach to training the body. Claiming for the body an intrinsic freedom and merit, Duncan transported those for whom she danced into an evanescent realm of feeling-filled forms (figure 2). Her work has been reconstructed by a number of companies that currently perform and teach regularly throughout the United States. It has also been preserved in the practices of dance camps that offer summer study, primarily to women, in interpretive dancing.

For Duncan and those following in her tradition, the dancing body manifests an original naturalness. Unadorned by the contrived distortions of movement that modern society incurs, the ideal body inheres in a primal experience of integration both within one's self and within society. Its harmonious passages for the limbs and graceful phrasing emanate from the protean ductility of the respiring central torso. It is here, in the region of the solar plexus, that soul and body meet and converse. The ideal body resides within every body but deforms at an early age in response to social pressures. By requiring dance study of all young children, it is thought, society will make itself over, for dance is a revolutionary force that evokes noble and pure motives in all its participants.

In order to cultivate the natural body and to allow it to relinquish affected habits, Duncan's approach advocates the study of "basic" human movements such as walking, running, skipping, lying down, standing, turning, and jumping—all performed with a graceful, relaxed fullness, initiated by patterns of breath. These basic movements form sequences practiced to music of great nineteenth-century classical composers. Dancers also act out simple imaginary scenarios guided by the music's meter and harmonic development. Since music is considered to be the truest expression of the human soul, dance, which replicates its compositional structure, can likewise indicate the soul's ephemeral but fervent states of being. When students are asked to "retreat, shielding themselves from an evil force moving toward them," or to "fall to the earth, lie quietly, and then rise to greet the sun," they are participating, body and soul, in primordial human situations.

Students imitate the unpretentious intent and full-bodied commitment of the teacher, who frequently dances alongside them. The actual shape of the limbs is less important than the degree of involvement in the dance, evident in the face, the quality of movement, and the graceful connections among areas of the body. These criteria for success discourage critical evaluation of one's own or others' bodies (such a pronounced distance between perceived and ideal bodies could only result in pretentious performance). Instead, through repetition in a communal setting, movement and music work their elevating, liberating charm. The ideal body, then, one that has achieved simplicity in its

movement and harmony with the self, issues from a nurturing collective of bodies.[6]

Graham Technique. For Martha Graham, the dancing body must possess the strength, flexibility, and endurance necessary to provide the expressive self with a fully responsive instrument (figure 3). The goal of dance, to represent in archetypal form the deep conflicts of the human psyche, can be realized only through a rigorous training program. As with Duncan, the body functions as a perfect index of the self's feelings. The self's ability to express those feelings, though, like the body's ability to manifest them, shares none of Duncan's exuberance—the self is too dark and repressed, the act of expression too tortured for movement to be light and free-flowing. The ideal body, then, even as it manifests an agile responsiveness, also shows in the strained quality and definition of its musculature the ordeal of expression.

Graham's technique coalesced out of the vocabulary she developed in her earliest dances. The basic set of exercises, which became routine by the 1950s, dominated the American university dance curriculum for many years, and it continues to provide a coherent and viable alternative to ballet training in dance schools around the world. The first half of a class—as much time as the ballet student spends at the barre—consists of exercises performed in a sitting or lying position; students then practice sequences standing and, finally, traveling across the floor. The exercises privilege movements originating in the torso and radiating out with restrained tension to the periphery of the body. The slow progression from sitting to standing to traveling, and the tensile successions from central to peripheral body, affirm both the possibility and the difficulty of bodily expression. Exercises, repeated with slight variations composed by the teacher each day, cause the body to spiral around a spinal core, extending out and then pulling back into dynamic positions. The body, galvanized into action as much by its own potential energy as by the dissonant textures of the musical accompaniment, arrives on the downbeat, but then surges almost immediately in a new direction. Although the precise metric requirements for these miniature cycles of attraction and withdrawal give the class an almost military appearance, tensile elasticity predominates over visual pattern in the overall movement.

The principal metaphor explored in these exercises, that of contraction and release, promotes a connection between physical and psychological functioning. Students introspectively delve into the interior body as they contract and relate internal to external space through various pathways of release. Unlike Duncan's classes, in which the student is cast into imagined situations, the comments made in Graham's classes refer only indirectly to psychological experience: they allude to the self's condition by contextualizing physical cor-

3. Martha Graham in her *Cave of the Heart.*
Courtesy of the Dance Collection, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

rections within the larger and arduous project of becoming an artist. Just as the choreographer must submit to constant self-interrogation concerning the validity of the dance's message, so the dancer scrutinizes self as well as body in a search for the causes of the body's unresponsiveness. The dancer's perceived body, always lacking either in integration or articulation, must struggle to become more than it is—a quest that, in turn, strengthens and sensitizes the self.[7]

Cunningham Technique. Merce Cunningham, a member of the third generation of American modern dancers, left Martha Graham's company in the late 1940s to develop his own approach to choreography and technique.

Cunningham's method presents the physicality of multiple bodies inscribing complex spatial and temporal patterns (figure 4). His conception of the dancing body fuses body and self by immersing the self in the practical pursuit of enhancing the body's articulacy. The self does not use the body for its own expressive purposes as in Graham or Duncan; rather, it dedicates itself, as in ballet, to the craftlike task of preparing and presenting movement. Unlike ballet, however, a radically nonhierarchical definition of competence and distinctive value prevails. Cunningham's approach celebrates unique physiques, quirkiness, and the unanticipated. This is, in part, the open-ended message his dances convey.

Exercises for the technique class vary from day to day as they systematically explore the body's segments and their possible range of movement. They present spinal curves, arches and twists, leg lifts, knee bends, brushes of the foot—all using quotidian names for parts of the body and their actions. Sequences of these moves, complex in duration, meter, and rhythm, form subtle relations with the surrounding space. Students focus on accomplishing clear bodily enunciations of these spatiotemporal relations. The dancer is asked to enhance bodily accomplishment by remaining alert and concentrated, to be "quick on his or her feet." Where ballet's ideal body privileges certain joint actions over others, Cunningham's ideal body is imbued equally throughout with animated alertness.

The teacher presents movement sequences as problems to be solved. Students are asked to focus on and to demonstrate, through their articulacy, the choreography inherent in the movement sequences. The height of a jump or extended leg matters less than the clear presentation of complex directives—quick changes of weight or focus, polyrhythmic patterns in different body parts, carefully patterned paths of movement across the floor. The accompanist reinforces the emphasis on composition by experimenting with different tonal and timbral frameworks, even for the repetition of a given exercise. Such a strong and contrasting musical presence affirms the autonomy of dance and

4. Merce Cunningham and Barbara Lloyd in *Rainforest.*
Photo: Oscar Bailey. Courtesy of the Dance Collection,
the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts,
Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

music as expressive media. Students must attend to the two distinct forms simultaneously and to their unpredictable relationships, rather than to fuse one with the other.[8]

Contact Improvisation Technique. If the Cunningham body is a jointed one, the body cultivated in contact improvisation is weighted and momentous. This technique, developed collaboratively in the early 1970s by Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, Lisa Nelson, and others, explores the body's relations to gravity and to other bodies which result from its ability to flow as a physical mass (figure 5). Contact improvisation gained popularity rapidly in the United States during the 1970s and early 1980s as an artistic and social movement. Its technique classes were complemented by frequent informal practice sessions known as "jams," which allowed dancers to learn from, perform for, and socialize with one another. Its lyrical athleticism has been incorporated into the movement style of many dance companies in the United States and also in Europe, where it offers one of the few alternatives to ballet training.

Unlike any of the other techniques discussed here, contact improvisation sets parameters for how to move but does not designate a set vocabulary of movements for students to learn. Students explore through improvisation the movement territory established by the stylistic and technical rules of the form. Classes include practice at simple skills of weight transfer as well as opportunities to use them through improvisation with others. Exercises present ways to "drain weight" out of one area of the body, to "collect" it in another, and to transfer weight across any of the body's joints. Certain lifts or rolls are practiced again and again; other exercises direct students to experiment for several minutes at a time with methods of regulating and channeling the body's weight on their own or with a partner. As in Duncan's approach, the body is believed to have its own intelligence—though one encumbered by its artificial and ungainly habits. Dancers can be advised on how to roll, jump into another's arms, or land from a great height, but they are also encouraged to "listen" to the body, to be sensitive to its weight and inclinations and to allow new possibilities of movement to unfold spontaneously by attending to the shifting network of ongoing interactions.

The teacher's guidance, like the students' participation, is based on an assessment of the needs of the moment. Rather than specifying a series of preconceived forms, both teacher and students must determine what movement is appropriate for the group at a given time. In this democratic, unpredictable, and highly physical situation, the dancer's self becomes immersed in the body, as it does for Cunningham. The body, however, is not invested with an ongoing identity: its definition is constantly renegotiated in the changing context of the improvised dance. Ideally, its strength should be sufficient to

5. Contact improvisation by Nancy Stark Smith and Andrew Harwood. Photo: Bill Arnold, 1985.

bear the weight of another; but even more important, it must manifest an ability to go with the flow.[9]

Both contact improvisation and Duncan technique cast the teacher in the role of facilitator, and both ask students to appreciate and encourage one another. Each of these techniques embraces all participants in the class, whatever their age or level of expertise, as members of a community of dancers. In ballet, by contrast, the hierarchy of values evident in the levels of classes and companies, in the choreography itself, and in its viewers' responses all incite competition among students. Teachers, as they introduce the tradition's standards for success and rank the students' performance against them, embody the authority of the tradition's abstract ideals. Graham's technique, on the other hand, places dancers in competition with each other but also with themselves. Criteria for success revolve around the dancer's ability to perform fully Graham's vocabulary of movement, but the dancer is also asked to fuse inner motivation with physical form. The teacher encourages the student to measure this psychological and physical participation through comments that question one's commitment to discipline. Cunningham's technique, with its emphasis on composition, encourages dancers to interest themselves in making dance as well as in performing. Students take from class whatever insights may be relevant to their own careers as choreographers and dancers.

The structure of authority developed in each class helps to connect the dancing body to its aesthetic project. Ballet's prescribed pairings of positions and steps, and its emphasis on outwardly rotated legs and arms, constructs a flexible, elegant, lifted body that displays the classical linear and aerial forms that are the hallmarks of that tradition. The teacher's concise directives place the student within that tradition. Duncan's walks and skips, different from the quotidian in their rhythm and quality, embody an ideal of naturalness. Their graceful, grounded litheness seeks to render the body transparent to the luminous inclinations of the soul. The teacher's enthusiasm and conviction help to incorporate the student into the dancing community. The restrained successive movements of Graham's contraction and release build a sinewy, tensile, dynamic body that symbolizes a self full of turbulent feelings and the struggle inherent in expressing those feelings. The teacher's intimation of the arduous training ahead warns students of their need for commitment as it summons them to the dance. Cunningham's matter-of-fact inventory of the body's structural capabilities produces a lanky, intelligent, alert body that eloquently declaims its own physicality. Cunningham teachers tend to approach their students as junior colleagues, instructing them while preserving their autonomy as potential artists. Contact improvisation's athletic, fleet body realizes itself

through the act of contact with others. Its teachers must consistently empower students with the ability to improvise an innovative and sensitive response to the collective gathering of dancers.

Much more could be said about each of these techniques—how each elaborates a set of relations among parts of the body, and among dancing bodies, and how each develops the body within a sonoral and architectural environment. Ballet dancers, for example, have insisted on practicing before a mirror since the middle of the eighteenth century, whereas Duncan preferred teaching outdoors on a carefully groomed lawn. Through choices such as these, reiterated daily in distinctive routines, each technique introduces students to the set of metaphors out of which their own perceived and ideal bodies come to be constructed. It also instructs them in the rhetorical relations that bind body to self and to community.

The "Hired" Body

Prior to the last decade, each of these techniques was considered to be unique. Not only did each mark the body so deeply that a dancer could not adequately perform another technique, but each aesthetic project was conceived as mutually exclusive of, if not hostile to, the others. Recently, however, choreographic experimentation with eclectic vocabularies and with new interdisciplinary genres of performance has circumvented the distinctiveness of these bodies. A new cadre of dance makers, called "independent choreographers," has emerged; their aesthetic vision can be traced to the experimental choreography of the early 1960s and 1970s, a period when choreographic investigation challenged boundaries between dance and day-to-day movement and claimed any and all human movement as potential dance. Because these choreographers' work neither grows out of, nor is supported by, any of the academies of dance, classical or modern, their success depends largely on their own entrepreneurial efforts to promote their work. New institutions of "arts management and administration" have grown to meet the needs of producing their work. Issues of fashion and fundability have increasingly influenced their aesthetic development.

These choreographers have not developed new dance techniques to support their choreographic goals, but instead encourage dancers to train in several existing techniques without adopting the aesthetic vision of any. They require a new kind of body, competent at many styles (figure 6). The new multitalented body resulting from this training melds together features from all the techniques discussed above: it possesses the strength and flexibility found in ballet necessary to lift the leg high in all directions; it can perform any

6. Mark Morris with Susan Hadley and Rob Besserer
in Morris's *Pièce en Concert.* Photo: Beatriz Schiller, 1987.

movement neutrally and pragmatically, as in Cunningham's technique; it has mastered the athleticism of contact improvisation, enabling a dancer to fall and tumble, and to support another's weight; it articulates the torso as a Graham dancer does; it has the agility of Duncan's dancers.

This body exists alongside others that remain more deeply involved in, and consequently more expert at, the techniques I have outlined. It does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles but, rather, homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface. Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing.

The hired body has been shaped partly by contemporary practices of physical education, whose goals for such activities as sports, aerobics, and individual exercise programs—jogging, swimming, weight lifting, and so on—have been set by the scientization of the body's needs. Like the ideal body promoted by these activities, this hired body should achieve a certain heart rate, a general level of strength and flexibility, and a muscular tonus. The criteria for evaluating its training share physical education's specialized and scientific orientation. They use the language of biology and kinesiology to appraise the strength, flexibility, and endurance of the body's muscle groups. Through this scientific language of the body, the body's character is reduced to principles of physics: it can be enlarged here, elasticized there. This body, a purely physical object, can be made over into whatever look one desires. Like one's "lifestyle," it can be constructed to suit one's desires.

Of equal influence on the hired body is the video dancing body, which is as familiar to "dancercize" and MTV enthusiasts as to theatrical dance choreographers, performers, and viewers. The video dancing body is often constructed from the edited tapes of dance movement filmed from different angles and distances. Its motion can be slowed, smeared, or replicated so that it performs breathtaking feats, and yet it projects none of the tensile qualities of movement, the body's situation in space, or the charisma of a live performance. Nonetheless, it offers to performers, choreographers, and scholars the irresistible promise of a "permanent" record of the dance, which can be viewed and reviewed indefinitely. This record, helpful as a tool in the choreographic process, has become increasingly mandatory as a promotional device required by all dance producers and funding agencies as an unproblematic simulacrum of live dance.

Although the video body bears little resemblance to any of the bodies perceived in the dance class, it shares with the hired body certain ideals. Both feature a rubbery flexibility coated with impervious glossiness, and both are equally removed from the aesthetic vision that implements them. Training to

construct it primarily takes place standing behind the camera and sitting in the editing room. The techniques it manifests, along with the aesthetic orientation it supports, belong properly to the medium of video, not to dance as a performing art. Training to construct the hired body occurs in rooms full of bodybuilding machines or in dance classes whose overall aesthetic orientation may hold little appeal. Still, both video and hired bodies appear as the products of an efficient and "unbiased" training program, assumed to be neutral and completely adaptable; as a result, they mask the process through which dance technique constructs the body.

Of course, there is nothing new about the assertion of a normative or original body, or an efficacious way to instruct the body. Duncan and the other early modernists, for example, obscured their approach to constructing the body by insisting on the "naturalness" of their training. Their "natural" body, however, contravened prevailing aesthetic ideals and presented a profoundly different alternative, whereas the multipurpose hired body subsumes and smooths over differences. The modernist approach to dance making, even as it promoted the body's movement as material substance to be worked into art, assumed an irrevocable connection to a self. The hired body, built at a great distance from the self, reduces it to a pragmatic merchant of movement proffering whatever look appeals at the moment. It not only denies the existence of a true, deep self, but also proscribes a relational self whose desire to empathize predominates over its need for display. The hired body likewise threatens to obscure the opportunity, opened to us over this century, to apprehend the body as multiple, protean, and capable, literally, of being made into many different expressive bodies.

Notes

1 See, for example, Roland Barthes, *The Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); and *Barthes by Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). Barthes, however, also uses the body as a symbol for desire and the unconscious.

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2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

3 Marcel Mauss, essay in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), pp. 454–77.

4 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 25.

5 Descriptions of the ballet class can be found in Merrill Ashley and Larry Kaplan, *Dancing for Balanchine* (New York: Dutton, 1984); Cynthia Lyle, *Dancers on Dancing* (New York: Drake, 1977); and Joseph Mazo, *Dance Is a Contact Sport* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1974).

6 For more detailed accounts of Duncan's approach to dance technique, see Irma Duncan, *Duncan Dancer* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966); Irma Duncan, *The Technique of Isadora Duncan* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Dance Horizons, 1970); and Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance* (New York: Theatre Arts, 1928).

7 Graham's philosophy of dance technique is summarized in her article "The American Dance," in Merle Armitage and Virginia Stewart, eds., *Modern Dance* (New York: Weyhe, 1935), pp. 101–6; idem, "A Dancer's World" (transcript of the film *A Dancer's World*), *Dance Observer*, January 1958, p. 5; and in Alice Helpern, "The Evolution of Martha Graham's Technique" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1981).

8 Cunningham describes his approach to dance technique in his article "The Function of a Technique for Dance," in Walter Sorell, ed., *The Dance Has Many Faces* (New York: World Publishing, 1951), pp. 250–55; and, in conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve, *The Dancer and the Dance* (New York: Boyars, 1985).

9 For a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the development of contact improvisation, see Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: An Ethnography of Contact Improvisation* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); and *Contact Quarterly*, a journal featuring articles on contact improvisation.